

**E. M. CIORAN**

"A superb literary essayist."  
—*The New York Times*

**ANATHEMAS  
AND  
ADMIRATIONS**

TRANSLATED BY

*Richard Howard*



**THE ARCADE CIORAN**

***ANATHEMAS***  
***and***  
***ADMIRATIONS***

BY E. M. CIORAN

*Anathemas and Admirations*

*Drawn and Quartered*

*History and Utopia*

*On the Heights of Despair*

*A Short History of Decay*

*Tears and Saints*

*The Temptation to Exist*

*The Trouble with Being Born*

***ANATHEMAS***  
***and***  
***ADMIRATIONS***

\*

BY  
E. M. CIORAN

*Translated from the French by*  
***RICHARD HOWARD***

*Foreword by*  
***EUGENE THACKER***



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## **Foreword**

by Eugene Thacker

We like to imagine that poets die poetic deaths. One thinks of Shelley, who, after having reportedly seen his doppelgänger, drowned off the coast of Tuscany while sailing out to sea in his boat, the *Don Juan*. Or Nietzsche, the “mad” philosopher and iconoclast who suddenly collapses in Turin while witnessing the flogging of a horse, his tear-leaden arms thrown around the animal’s neck. In the 1990s, an emaciated, elderly man with sharp eyes and wavy hair is found sitting on the side of the street somewhere in Paris’s Latin Quarter. He is lost. He can recall neither the way back home nor even his address. He is taken home. Eventually he stops eating. After an accidental fall, he is brought to a hospital. He drifts in and out of lucidity, rarely recognizing those closest to him. He stops speaking entirely. After slipping into a coma, Emil Cioran dies, on June 20, 1995.

For Cioran, the twilight philosopher who once noted “the stillborn are the most free,” the end came not with melodramatic fair but gradually and quietly, though it was no less tragic. For several years, the Romanian-born writer had been grappling with Alzheimer’s. Writing became more and more difficult. Traveling, lectures, and interviews were impractical. Even a walk out the door took on an almost absurd risk. But Cioran’s final silence was, in a way, a long time coming. By the early 1980s, he was finding it more and more difficult to write, though the themes of his writing—pessimism, despair, melancholy, and a certain ecstatic antagonism towards the world—these continued to find their way into his increasingly sparse work. Now well into his seventies, he and Simone Boué continued to live in their Rue de l’Odéon apartment, where he divided his time between long walks in the Jardin du Luxembourg (where he and Samuel Beckett would often cross paths) and writing aphorisms in the cheap, multicolored Joseph Gibert notebooks he had been using for years, and that piled up on his desk in the hazy light of his top-floor writing alcove.

The present volume is a hybrid of Cioran’s last two major publications. In 1986, the solitary stroller who once wrote: “Solitude: so fulfilling that the merest rendezvous is a crucifixion,” published a book about friends and colleagues entitled *Exercices d’admiration*. It collected short articles written between the 1950s and the 1980s; some of them are about writers with whom Cioran had long-standing friendships (Samuel Beckett, Mircea Eliade, Henri Michaux), while others were about writers with whom he shared a certain temperament (Jorge Luis Borges, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Paul Valéry). There are lesser-known names, too: the Spanish philosopher María Zambrano, the Italian journalist Guido Ceronetti, and the Romanian-Jewish poet Benjamin Fondane.

The list is highly eclectic and situational, and between each essay, Cioran’s tone varies widely. Sometimes his writing becomes a hymn that sings the praise of an author, sometimes it takes on a personal, even autobiographical form, and sometimes the writing is cagey and contentious—often Cioran’s tone will encompass all of these at once. Of Beckett, for instance, Cioran has this to say: “He lives not in time but parallel to it, which is why it has never occurred to me to ask him what he thinks of

events.” Of Borges, he writes: “The misfortune of being recognized has befallen him. He deserved better. He deserved to remain in obscurity, in the Imperceptible, to remain as ineffable and unpopular as nuance itself.”

*Exercices d’admiration* is accompanied here by another, quite different book. Struggling with the gradual loss of his memory, in 1987 Cioran publishes *Aveux et anathèmes* (which could be translated as “Confessions and Curses”), a short book of aphorisms on the persistence of time, memory, and mortality. Composed of short, staccato fragments, the writing has all the urgency of a last word, and yet the almost tranquil distance of a documentarian: “How age simplifies everything! At the library I ask for four books. Two are set in type that is too small; I discard them without even considering their contents. The third, too ... serious, seems unreadable to me. I carry off the fourth without conviction.” Following the publication of *Aveux et anathèmes*, Cioran decides to stop writing altogether. But it is a gesture already in his mind early on. In a 1980 letter to a friend he notes: “Even the idea of writing makes me queasy, and with it comes disgust, failure, and a complete lack of satisfaction that, not daring to admit this to itself, turns sour.”

True to form, Cioran’s final writings were the result of a lived contradiction. A hermit singing the praises of others, an amnesiac obsessed with the persistence of memory and time. Circumstance or chance has deprived Cioran of the romantic death; all that remains is writing that leads to its own silence. But if there is a “poetic” image of the later Cioran, perhaps this is it.



In any book governed by the Fragment, truths and whims keep company throughout. How to sift them, to decide which is conviction, which caprice? One proposition, a momentary impulse, precedes or follows another, a life's companion raised to the dignity of an obsession. . . . It is the reader who must assign the roles', since in more than one instance, the author himself hesitates to take sides. The epigrams constitute a sequence of perplexities — in them we shall find interrogations but no answers. Moreover, what answer could there be? Had there been one, we should know it, to the great detriment of the enthusiast of stupor.

# 1

## *On the Verge of Existence*



WHEN CHRIST HARROWED HELL, the Just under the old law — Abel, Enoch, Noah — mistrusted his teaching and made no answer to his call. They took him for an emissary of the Tempter whose schemes they feared. Only Cain and those of his race adhered to such doctrine, or professed to, and followed him out of hell. Such was the doctrine of Mareion. “The wicked prosper,” that old objection to the notion of a merciful or at least honorable Creator — who consolidated it better than this heresiarch? Who else so acutely perceived its invincibility?



Amateur paleontologist, I have spent several months pondering the skeleton. Result: no more than a few pages. . . . The subject, it is true, scarcely warrants prolixity.



Applying the same treatment to a poet and a thinker strikes me as a lapse in taste. There are realms from which philosophers ought to abstain. To dissect a poem as if it were a system is a crime, even a sacrilege. Oddly enough, the poets exult when they do not understand the pronouncements made upon them. The jargon flatters them, gives them the illusion of preferment. Such weakness demeans them to the level of their glossators.



To Buddhism (indeed, to the Orient in general), Nothingness does not have the rather grim signification we attribute to it. It is identified with a limit-experience of light or, if you like, with a state of luminous absence, an everlasting radiant void: Being that has triumphed over all its properties, or rather non-Being supremely positive in that it dispenses bliss without substance, without substratum, without support in any world at all.



Solitude: so fulfilling that the merest rendezvous is a crucifixion.



Hindu philosophy pursues deliverance; Greek — with the exception of Pyrrho, Epicurus, and a few unclassifiable figures — is a disappointment: it seeks only . . . truth.



Nirvana has been compared to a mirror that no longer reflects any object. To a mirror, then, forever pure, forever unemployed.

\*

Christ having named Satan “Prince of this world,” Saint Paul, to go one better, struck home: “God of this world.” When such authorities designate our ruler by name, who is entitled to *disinherited* status?

\*

Man is free, save for his depths. On the surface, he does as he likes; down there, *will* is a meaningless syllable.

\*

To disarm the envious, we should take to the streets on crutches. Only the spectacle of our collapse can humanize, to some extent, our friends and our enemies.

\*

Rightly, in every age it is assumed we are witnessing the disappearance of the last traces of the earthly paradise.

\*

Christ again: according to one Gnostic source, he ascended— in abhorrence of *fatum* — to trouble celestial arrangements and to prevent any questioning of the heavenly bodies. In such confusion, what can have happened to my poor star?

\*

Kant waited until the last days of his old age to perceive the dark side of existence and to indicate “the failure of any rational theodicy.” . . . Others have been luckier: to them this occurred even before they began to philosophize.

\*

Apparently matter, jealous of life, seeks to discover its weak points and to punish its initiatives, its betrayals. For life is life only by infidelity to matter.

\*

I am distinct from all my sensations. I fail to understand how. I even fail to understand *whose* they are. Moreover, who is this I initiating the three propositions?

\*

I have just read a biography. The notion that all the figures it describes no longer exist except in this book strikes me as so intolerable that I have had to lie down to avoid a collapse.

\*

What entitles you to fling my truths in my face? You are taking a liberty I deny. Granted, all you allege is correct, but I have not authorized you to be frank with me. (After each outburst of rage, shame accompanied by the invariable swagger — “At least there’s some life in that” — followed in its turn by even greater shame.)

\*

“I am a coward, I cannot endure the pain of being happy.” To sound someone out, to *know* him, it is enough to see how he reacts to Keats’s avowal. If he fails to understand immediately, no use continuing.

\*

*Affrightment*: a pity the word should have vanished with the great churchmen.

\*

Man being an ailing animal, any of his remarks, his gestures, has *symptomatic* value.

\*

“I am amazed that so remarkable a man could have died,” I once wrote to a philosopher’s widow. I realized the stupidity of my letter only after mailing it: to send another would be to risk a second blunder. With regard to condolences, whatever is not a cliché borders on impropriety or aberration.

\*

In her seventies, Lady Montague admitted she had ceased looking at herself in a mirror eleven years before. Eccentricity? Perhaps, but only to those ignorant of the calvary of daily encounters with one’s own . . . countenance.

\*

What can I speak of save what I feel? And right now I feel nothing. Everything seems erased — suspended. Let me not be proud of this, nor embittered by it. “In the course of the many lives we have lived,” says *The Treasure of the True Law*, “how often have we been born in vain, how often have we died!”

\*

The further man advances, the less he will have to convert to.

\*

The best way to get rid of an enemy is to speak well of him everywhere. What you say will be repeated to him, and he will no longer have the strength to harm you: you have broken his mainspring. . . . He will still campaign against you, but without vigor or consistency, for unconsciously he will have ceased to hate you. He is conquered, though unaware of his defeat.

\*

Claudel’s famous edict: “I am for every Jupiter, against every Prometheus,” We may have lost our illusions about revolt, yet such an enormity awakens the terrorist slumbering in us all.

\*

One holds no grudges against those one has insulted; quite the contrary, one is disposed to grant them every imaginable virtue. Alas, such generosity is never to be met with in the injured party.

\*

I haven’t much use for anyone who can spare Original Sin. Myself, I resort to it on every occasion, and without it I don’t see how I should avoid uninterrupted consternation.

\*

Kandinsky maintains that *yellow* is the color of life. . . . Now we know why this hue so hurts the eyes.

\*

When we must make a crucial decision, it is extremely dangerous to consult anyone else, since no one, with the exception of a few misguided souls, sincerely wishes us well.

\*

To invent new words, according to Madame de Staël, is the “surest symptom of intellectual sterility,” The remark seems truer today than it was at the beginning of the last century. As early as 1649, Vaugelas decreed, “No one may create new words, not

even the sovereign,” Let writers, and especially philosophers, ponder this ban even before they start thinking!

\*

We learn more in one white night than in a year of sleep. Practically speaking, the adoption of tobacco is much more instructive than any number of regular naps.

\*

The earaches Swift suffered from are partly responsible for his misanthropy. If I am so interested in others’ infirmities, it is because I want to find immediate points in common with them. I sometimes feel I have shared all the agonies of those I admire.

\*

This morning, after hearing an astronomer mention “billions of suns,” I renounced my morning ablutions: what is the use of washing one more time?

\*

\*

Boredom is indeed a form of anxiety, but an anxiety purged of fear. When we are bored we dread nothing except boredom itself.

\*

Anyone who has passed through an ordeal patronizes those who have not had to undergo it. . . . The intolerable fatuity of patients who have survived an operation . . .

\*

At the Paris-Moscow exhibition, my amazement in front of the portrait of the young Remizov by Ilya Repin. When I knew him, Remizov was eighty-six years old; he lived in a virtually empty apartment his concierge wanted for her daughter and schemed to evict him from, on the pretext that the place was a plague-spot, a rat’s nest. The man Pasternak considered the greatest Russian stylist had come to that. The contrast between the wretched, withered old man, long forgotten by the world, and the image of the brilliant youth in front of me robbed me of any desire to visit the rest of the exhibition.

\*

The Ancients mistrusted success because they feared not only the gods’ jealousy but, even more, the danger of an inner imbalance linked to any success as such. To have understood this jeopardy — how far beyond us they were!

\*

Impossible to spend sleepless nights and accomplish anything: if, in my youth, my parents had not *financed* my insomnias, I should surely have killed myself.

\*

In 1849 Sainte-Beuve wrote that youth was turning away from *le mal romantique* in order to dream, like the Saint-Simonians, of “the limitless triumph of industry.” This dream, which has come true, discredits all our undertakings, and the very idea of *hope*.

\*

Those children I never wanted to have — if only they knew what happiness they owe me!

\*

While my dentist was crushing my jaw, I realized that Time is the one subject for meditation, that because of Time I was in this fatal chair and everything was breaking

down, including what was left of my teeth.

\*

If I have always mistrusted Freud, my father is responsible: he used to tell my mother his dreams, thus spoiling all my mornings,

\*

A hankering for evil is innate — no need to acquire it by effort. The child exercises his nasty instincts from the first — with what skill, what competence, and what rage! A pedagogy worthy of the name should prescribe sessions in a straitjacket. And perhaps, past childhood, we should extend this measure to every age, for the good of all concerned.

\*

Woe to the writer who fails to cultivate his megalomania, who sees it diminished without taking action. He will soon discover that one does not become *normal* with impunity.

\*

I was suffering from torments I could not dispel. A ring at the door; I opened it: a lady of a certain age whom I was certainly not expecting. For three hours she assailed me with such nonsense that my torments turned to rage, I was saved.

\*

Tyranny destroys or strengthens the individual; freedom enervates him, until he becomes no more than a puppet, Man has more chances of saving himself by hell than by paradise.

\*

Two friends, both actresses in a country of eastern Europe. One decamps to the West, becoming rich and famous there; the other remains where she is, poor and obscure. Half a century later, the second woman takes a trip and pays a visit to her fortunate colleague. “She used to be a head taller than me, and now she’s a shrunken old woman, and paralyzed into the bargain.” Other details follow, and in conclusion: “I’m not afraid of death; I’m afraid of death in life.” Nothing like recourse to philosophical reflection to camouflage a belated revenge.

\*

Fragments, fugitive thoughts, you say. Can you call them *fugitive* when you are dealing with obsessions — with thoughts whose precise quality is not to *flee*?

\*

I had just written a very temperate, very correct note to someone who scarcely deserved it. Before sending it, I added a few allusions vaguely tinged with gall. And then, just when I was putting the thing in the mailbox, I felt myself clutched by rage and, along with it, by a disdain for my noble impulse, for my regrettable fit of *distinction*.

\*

Picpus Cemetery. A young man and a lady past her prime. The caretaker explains that this cemetery is reserved for descendants of those who were guillotined. The lady blurts out, “But that’s who we are!” With what an expression! After all, she might have been telling the truth. Yet that provocative tone immediately put me on the executioner’s side.

\*

Opening Meister Eckhart's *Sermons*, I read that suffering is intolerable to one who suffers for himself but light to one who suffers for God, because it is God who bears the burden, though it be heavy with the suffering of all mankind. It is no accident that I have come across this passage, for it perfectly applies to one who can never relieve himself of all that weighs upon him.

\*

According to the kabbala, God permits His splendor to diminish so that, men and angels can endure it — which comes down to saying that the Creation coincides with an impoverishment of the divine lumen, an effort toward darkness to which the Creator has assented. The hypothesis of God's deliberate obscuration has the merit of making us accessible to our own shadows, responsible for our irreceptivity to a certain light.

\*

The ideal: to be able to repeat oneself like . . . Bach.

\*

Immense, supernatural aridity: as if I were beginning a second existence on another planet where speech is unknown, in a universe refractory to language and incapable of creating such a thing for itself.

\*

One does not inhabit a country; one inhabits a language. That is our country, our fatherland — and no other.

\*

After reading in a work of psychoanalytic inspiration that as a young man Aristotle was jealous of Philip, the father of Alexander, his future pupil, one cannot help regarding a would-be therapeutic system in which such situations are posited as suspect, for it *invents* secrets for the pleasure of inventing explanations and cures.

\*

There is something of the charlatan in anyone who triumphs in any realm whatever.

\*

Visit a hospital, and in five minutes you become a Buddhist, or become one again if you have left off being such a thing.

\*

Parmenides. Nowhere do I perceive the Being he exalts, and fail to see myself in his sphere, which includes no fault, no *place* for me.

\*

In this compartment, a hideous woman sitting opposite, snoring, mouth open: an obscene agony. What was to be done? How endure such a spectacle? Stalin came to my aid. In his youth, passing between two rows of cossacks who were whipping him, he utterly concentrated upon reading a book, so that his consciousness of the blows was completely diverted. Strengthened by this example, I too plunged into my book, and halted at each word with extreme application till the moment the monster ended her agony.

\*

I was saying to a friend the other day that while I no longer believed in “writing,” I was reluctant to abandon it, that work was a defensible illusion, and that after scribbling a page or even a sentence, I always felt like whistling.

\*

Religions, like the ideologies that have inherited their vices, are reduced to crusades against humor.

\*

Every philosopher I’ve ever known, without exception, was “impulsive.” This flaw of the West has marked the very ones who should be exempt from it.

\*

To be like God and not like the gods, that is the goal of the true mystics, who aim too high to condescend to polytheism.

\*

I am invited to a colloquium abroad, there being a need, apparently, for my vacillations. The skeptic-on-duty of a decaying world.

\*

My habitation? I shall never know. True, one has no better knowledge of where God resides, for what is the sense of the expression “to reside in oneself” for those of us who lack any *basis*, both in and outside ourselves?

\*

I abuse the word *God*; I use it often, too often. I employ it each time I touch an extremity and need a word to designate what comes *after*. I prefer God to the Inconceivable.

\*

One work of piety declares that the inability to take sides is a sign one is not “enlightened by the divine light.” In other words, irresolution, that total *objectivity*, is the road to perdition.

\*

I infallibly discern a flaw in all those who are interested in the same things as myself. . . .

\*

To have read through a work on old age solely because the author’s photograph led me to do so. That mixture of rictus and entreaty, and that expression of grimacing stupor — what hype, what an endorsement!

\*

“This world was not created according to the will of Life,” it is said in the *Ginza*, a Gnostic text of a Mandaean sect in Mesopotamia. Remember this whenever you have no better argument to neutralize a disappointment.

\*

After so many years, after a whole life, I saw her again. “Why are you crying?” I asked her immediately. “I’m not,” she answered. And indeed she was not crying, she was smiling at me, but age having distorted her features, joy no longer found access to her face, on which one might also have read, “Whoever does not die young will regret it sooner or later.”

\*

A man who survives spoils his . . . biography. In the long run, the only destinies that can be regarded as fulfilled are obstructed ones.

\*

We should bother our friends only for our burial. And even then . . .!

\*

Boredom, with a bad reputation for frivolity, nonetheless allows us to glimpse the abyss from which issues the need for prayer.

\*

“God has created nothing more odious to Himself than this world, and from the day He created it. He has not glanced at it again, so much does He loathe it.” The Moslem mystic who wrote that, I don’t know who it was, I shall never know this friend’s name.

\*

Undeniable trump card of the dying: being able to utter banalities without compromising themselves.

\*

Retiring to the countryside after the death of his daughter, Tullia, Cicero, overwhelmed by grief, wrote letters of consolation to himself. A pity they have not been recovered and, still more, that such a therapeutics has not found favor! True, if it had been adopted, religions would long since have gone bankrupt.

\*

A patrimony all our own: the hours when we have done nothing. . . . It is they that form us, that individualize us, that make us *dissimilar*.

\*

A Danish psychoanalyst suffering from insistent migraine and who had undergone treatment with a colleague, to no effect, went to Freud, who cured him in several months. It was Freud himself who declared he had done so, and he was readily believed. A disciple, however inept, cannot fail to feel better after daily contact with his master. What better cure than to see the man whom one esteems most in the world taking such extended interest in your miseries! Few infirmities would not yield to such solicitude. Let us recall that the master had every quality of a founder of a sect, though disguised as a man of science. If he achieved cures, it was less by method than by *faith*.

\*

“Old age is the most unexpected thing of all that happens to man,” notes Trotsky a few years before his end. If, as a young man, he had had the exact, visceral intuition of this truth, what a miserable revolutionary he would have made!

\*

Noble deeds are possible only in periods when self-irony is not yet rife.

\*

It was his lot to fulfill himself only halfway. Everything in him was *truncated*: his way of life, like his way of thinking. A man of fragments, himself a fragment.

\*

Dreams, by abolishing time, abolish death. The deceased take advantage of them

in order to importune us. Last night, there was my father. He was just as I have always known him, yet I had a moment's hesitation. Suppose it wasn't my father? We embraced in the Rumanian manner but, as always with him, without effusion, without warmth, without the demonstrativeness customary in an expansive people. It was because of that sober, icy kiss that I knew it was indeed my father. I woke up realizing that one resuscitates only as an intruder, as a dream-spoiler, and that such distressing immortality is the only kind there is.

\*

Punctuality, a kind of "pathology of scruple," To be on time, I would be capable of committing a crime.

\*

Above the pre-Socratics, one is occasionally inclined to set those heresiarchs whose works were mutilated or destroyed and who survive only in a few fragments of speech, as mysterious as one could wish for.

\*

Why, after performing a good deed, does one long to follow a flag, any flag? Generous impulses involve a certain danger; they make one lose one's head — unless one is generous precisely because one has lost one's head already, generosity being a patent form of intoxication.

\*

Each time the future seems conceivable to me, I have the impression of having been visited by Grace.

\*

If only it were possible to identify that vice of fabrication whose trace the universe so visibly bears!

\*

I am always amazed to see how lively, normal, and unassailable *low feelings* are. When you experience them, you feel cheered, restored to the community, on equal footing with your kind.

\*

If man so readily forgets he is accursed, it is because he has always been so.

\*

Criticism is a misconception: we must read not to understand others but to understand ourselves.

\*

A man who sees himself *as he is* stands higher than a man who raises the dead, according to a saint. Not knowing oneself is the universal law, and no one transgresses it with impunity. The truth is that no one has the courage to transgress it, which accounts for the saint's exaggeration.

\*

It is easier to imitate Jupiter than Lao-Tse.

\*

*Keeping up* is the mark of a fluctuating mind that pursues nothing personal, that is unsuited to obsession, that *continual* impasse.

\*

The eminent ecclesiastic sneered at Original Sin. “That sin is your livelihood. Without it you would starve to death, for your ministry would have no further meaning. If man has not fallen since his origins, why has Christ come? To redeem whom, and what?” To my objections, his sole response was a condescending smile. A religion is finished when only its adversaries strive to preserve its integrity.

\*

The Germans do not see that it is absurd to put a Pascal and a Heidegger in the same bag. The abyss yawns between a *Schicksal* and a *Beruf*, between a destiny and a profession.

\*

A sudden silence in the middle of a conversation suddenly brings us back to essentials: it reveals how dearly we must pay for the invention of speech.

\*

To have nothing more in common with men than the fact of being a man!

\*

A sensation must have fallen very low to deign to turn into an idea.

\*

Believing in God dispenses one from believing in anything else — which is an estimable advantage. I have always envied those who believed in Him, though to believe oneself God seems easier to me than believing *in* God.

\*

A word, once dissected, no longer signifies anything, is nothing. Like a body that, after the autopsy, is less than a corpse.

\*

Each desire provokes in me a counterdesire, so that whatever I do, all that matters is what I have not done.

\*

*Sarvam anityam*: All is transitory (Buddha). A formula one should repeat at every hour of the day, at the — admirable — risk of dying of it.

\*

Some diabolic thirst keeps me from exposing my pact with breathing.

\*

To lose sleep and to change language: two ordeals, one not dependent on oneself, the other deliberate. Alone, face to face with the nights and with words.

\*

The healthy are not real. They have everything except *being* — which is uniquely conferred by uncertain health.

\*

Of all the ancients, Epicurus may have been best at disdaining the mob — one more reason for celebrating him. What a notion, to place a clown like Diogenes in so lofty a niche! It is the Garden in question I should have haunted, and not the marketplace, nor — a fortiori — the tub. . . . (Yet Epicurus himself has disappointed me more than once: does he not call Theognis of Megara a fool for proclaiming it was better not to be born or, once born, to pass as soon as possible through the gates of

Hades?)

\*

“If I were assigned to classify human miseries,” writes the young Tocqueville, “I should do so in this order: sickness, death, doubt.” Doubt as scourge: I could never have put forth such an opinion, but I understand it as well as if I had uttered it myself — in another life.

\*

“The end of humanity will come when everyone is like me,” I declared one day in a fit I have no right to identify.

\*

No sooner does the door close behind me than I exclaim, “What perfection in the parody of hell!”

\*

“It is for the gods to come to me, not for me to go to them,” Plotinus answered his disciple Amelius, who had sought to take him to a religious ceremony. In whom in the Christian world could we find a like quality of pride?

\*

You had to let him talk on, talk about everything, and try to isolate the dazzling things that escaped him. It was a meaningless verbal eruption with the histrionic and crazy gesticulations of a saint. To put yourself on his level, you had to divagate in his fashion, to utter sublime and incoherent sentences. A posthumous tête-à-tête, between impassioned ghosts.

\*

At Saint-Séverin, listening to the organist play the *Art of the Fugue*, I kept saying to myself, over and over, “There is the *refutation* of all my anathemas.”